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March 7, 2005

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The Honorable Deborah Ortiz
Member, California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 5114
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SUPPORT FOR SENATE BILL 162

Dear Senator Ortiz:

The Little Hoover Commission supports SB 162, the measure you have authored to establish a Department of Public Health, directed by a physician health officer, and advised by a public health board. The Commission supports this measure based on findings and recommendations in its January 2002 report, *Be Prepared: Getting Ready for New and Uncertain Dangers*, and its April 2003 report, *To Protect & Prevent: Rebuilding California's Public Health System*.

In assessing the State's preparedness shortly after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Commission identified the public health system as the weakest link in California's homeland defense. It recommended the State fashion immediate and long-term improvements to public health assets. In its subsequent review focused on California's public health infrastructure, it found that core functions, including the prevention of epidemics, disease and injuries and protection from environmental hazards are not within a single state department or even a single agency. Those functions are scattered throughout the executive branch with no focused leadership, no coordination of efforts, and no informed public process.

The Commission concluded that strengthening the public health system would require changes in organizational structure, in the roles and capacities of key leaders, and in the process used for making decisions. It recommended the State consolidate into a new Department of Public Health those core functions necessary to support the locally based public health system. That new department should be lead by a well-respected state Surgeon General as an independent voice for public health reporting to the Governor, with oversight and advice of an expert and volunteer board. Because SB 162 addresses the Commission's recommendation, it is taking an active support position on the measure.

As the bill moves through the committee process, I will be writing letters on behalf of the Commission to legislators urging aye votes. If you feel my presence and testimony at a hearing would be helpful, please let me know, and I will make every attempt to be available.

Sincerely,

James P. Mayer
Executive Director

c: Commissioners